



## Commissioner's Column

# Forecasting the Future of Policing

JOHN W. BIZZACK | COMMISSIONER, DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE TRAINING

In February 2008, The National Intelligence University, Office of the Director of National Intelligence and the Center for Strategic Leadership, U.S. Army War College, released a report entitled, “55 Trends Now Shaping the Future of Policing.” This report provides national security officials, law enforcement agencies, think tanks, and academic institutions from across government and the private sector with keen insights into key trends that will influence both crime and the police who will be held responsible for controlling crime and its influences.

The goal was to analyze the trends that will affect policing in the United States and project their impact over the medium-term future, thus making it more possible to anticipate changing demands for police service, future staffing and budgetary requirements.

The report should be required reading for police executives and those who plan to become executives in the future. Here’s a summary.

There is no way to anticipate exactly how policing will evolve throughout the 21st century. The changes we can anticipate in the next decade — from energy issues to the economy — are enough for anyone to deal with; policing becomes particularly troublesome. Many of the future’s most important changes will require unusual responses from the law enforcement community and many of those adaptations may be difficult for institutions as conservative by nature and inclination as police agencies — and as dependent on public funds.

Obviously, a variety of forces will affect the future of policing including new technologies, demographic changes, evolving values, and continuing concerns over the threat of terrorism.

The obvious benefits for policing all come from a single source. As we have already seen, technology will make law enforcement both more efficient and more demanding. In the near future, officers will gain access to a wealth of information unavailable today, such as still and video images of most urban areas in the country. At first, these will be useful mostly for forensic reconstruction of crimes, but artificial intelligence systems eventually will analyze the images in real time and notify their human colleagues of crimes in progress. At the same time, these and other automated systems will take over much of the traditional traffic-enforcement role, freeing personnel for other duties. Police agencies also will have virtually

unrestricted access to the Internet, to national and international criminal databases, and to all manner of computerized data with little or no delay.

Combined, all of this will make it easier to ensure public safety and respond effectively to all manner of crime.

However, efficiency will come at a cost. In fact, there will be more than one price to pay. For example, criminals also will have access to some high-tech tools. The most important may be virtually unbreakable cryptography, which will make business records impossible to read and telephone calls and e-mail impossible to decipher. Eventually, only amateurs will leave documentary evidence of their crimes.

At the same time, near universal surveillance may be uncomfortable for some departments whose personnel are accustomed to relative autonomy. There have been many incidents in which police misconduct has been caught on the cell phone camera of a passer-by. In the future, these misdeeds also will be caught on urban video surveillance systems. This can only be rated a net positive if the threat of observation improves the professionalism of some departments.

Other changes coming to law enforcement will result from newly surfacing trends, specifically new demands for service, staffing problems, and — inevitably — tighter budgets.

As the American population changes, growing both older and more diverse, police and related agencies will see more of the familiar demands for help with problems that beset the aged. These include fraud, elder abuse, robbery and random violence. (See p. 40). However, less familiar problems also will proliferate. We already have seen the consequences of immigration, both legal and undocumented, from Latin America in the conflicting demands of community policing and border enforcement. Many more such problems lie ahead.

Yet, some of the most difficult challenges are likely to create problems in more mundane areas, such as staffing. New, high-tech policing will make much greater demands on the officer’s basic education and professional training. So will the growing need for skill with foreign languages and cultures. Personnel capable of mastering the necessary skills will be in demand from private industry, offering better pay and less stressful working conditions. This can only drive up the cost of hiring and training law enforcement personnel. It also may encourage departments